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SENATE APPROVES REAGAN'S REQUEST TO HELP CONTRAS

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WASHINGTON, March 27 — The Senate tonight narrowly approved President Reagan's request to send \$100 million to the guerrilla forces trying to depose the Sandinista Government in Nicaragua.

The vote was 53 to 47, as 42 Republicans and 11 Democrats supported the President in what he has called one of the major foreign policy tests of his second term. The request was opposed by 36 Democrats and 11 Republicans.

Senator Richard G. Lugar, the Indiana Republican who heads the Foreign Relations Committee, said the Senate had adopted a "new corollary to the Reagan doctrine" that would increase pressure on the Sandinistas to negotiate with the insurgents and respect the rights of their neighbors.

Delivery of \$75 Million Delayed

But Senator Jim Sasser of Tennessee, a leading Democratic spokesman, sharply disagreed, and said of today's vote: "I think it takes us farther down the road to the intervention of American military forces. It signals the abandonment of the last effort at a negotiated settlement."

In a related development, the Reagan Administration said that as long as Honduran troops stayed near their border with Nicaragua, United States Army helicopters would remain at their disposal to fly in weapons, ammunition, food and other supplies. The helicopters, piloted by American crews, began ferrying a 600-man detachment of Honduran soldiers to the border Wednesday. [Page A5.]

To win passage of his request, Mr. Reagan agreed to a plan that would delay delivery of \$75 million for 90 days, while diplomats seek a negotiated settlement to the fighting between the Nicaraguan Government and the rebels, known as contras. The other \$25 million would go immediately to the contras, and could be used for nonmilitary purposes, such as food and defensive weapons, including anti-aircraft missiles.

Issue Returning to House

Under the plan approved tonight, the remaining \$75 million would be released at the end of the 90-day period if the President certifies that the Sandinistas have not bargained in good faith. Congress could disagree with his judgment and pass a resolution blocking the funds, but it would be subject to a veto,

and critics would need a two-thirds vote in both houses to override the President.

The issue now returns to the House, which rejected an almost identical proposal by 12 votes last week. House leaders have promised to reconsider the issue on April 15, and some sort of compromise that provides military aid to the rebels is almost certain to be approved.

"I've always said that some sort of military aid will be adopted," said Senator Sasser. "It's just a question of what, if any, preconditions are passed."

Senator Bob Dole of Kansas, the majority leader, had hoped to win a sizable victory for the President's proposal, and he argued repeatedly in recent days that only a plan with broad support could form the basis of a "sustainable and credible" foreign policy.

Reports of an invasion of Honduras by Nicaraguan troops earlier this week apparently strengthened Mr. Dole's hand. But in the end, attempts to forge a bipartisan compromise broke down over two key disagreements.

Critics of the Administration wanted to mandate direct negotiations between Washington and Managua, but the White House adamantly rejected the notion. In addition, the critics wanted to give Congress a second chance to review the aid request after negotiations were tried, but the Administration opposed any additional Congressional review.

After the vote, Senator Sasser said the narrow margin "clearly shows the policy is not supported with any enthusiasm or overwhelming mandate." Senator Lugar said of the vote, however: "I think it's a good strong statement in the midst of a very controversial mood."

All Senators from New York, New Jersey and Connecticut opposed the President with two exceptions: Bill Bradley, Democrat of New Jersey, and Alfonse M. D'Amato, Republican of New York.

Congress has been wrestling with the Nicaraguan issue for most of this decade. American aid to the contras was allowed to lapse in 1984, after it was revealed that agents of the Central Intelligence Agency had helped mine Nicaraguan harbors. Last year the Congress rejected President Reagan's request for military aid to the rebels, but agreed to allot \$27 million in nonmilitary assistance.

The vote today favoring military assistance reflects a hardening attitude on Capitol Hill toward the Sandinistas, and a growing belief that the United States should move more actively to contain the external influence of the Government in Managua, and to force changes in its internal policies.

Senator Sasser told reporters that the main reason for the shifting sentiment in Congress was "the activities of the Sandinistas themselves." He added that there was "a clear and convincing case" that the Nicaraguan Government had "betrayed the promise of its own revolution" and was trying to establish a Marxist regime "on a Cuban model."

At the same time, most senators felt uncomfortable with extreme positions. Senator Edward M. Kennedy, a Massachusetts Democrat, offered an amendment to eliminate all aid to the contras, and Senator Mark O. Hatfield, an Oregon Republican, endorsed the proposal by saying: "If there is a parallel be-

tween our nightmare in Southeast Asia and the nightmare we're attempting to create here today, it is that we will virtually destroy the nation and the people we set out to save."

The Kennedy amendment was defeated, 74 to 24.

Senator Jesse Helms, Republican of North Carolina, then advanced a plan to send the \$100 million in aid to the contras by May 15, without significant restrictions. In arguing for his plan, Mr. Helms said: "This is a matter which Senators either favor or they do not. Either we are in favor of helping the Nicaraguans throw off Communist oppression, or we are not."

The Helms amendment, which was the closest option to Mr. Reagan's original request to Congress, was rejected 60 to 39.

Focus Is on Conditions

Accordingly, the core of the day's debate focused on what conditions would be attached to the \$100 million. The major Democratic initiative, sponsored by Senator Sasser, would have increased restrictions on the President in several ways. It would have provided \$30 million in nonmilitary assistance immediately, and postponed the whole question of military help for six months.

During that period, the President would have been required to enter direct talks with the Sandinistas. At the end of the six months, the President could have gone to Congress, certified that the negotiations had failed, and requested an additional appropriation for military assistance.

In arguing for his proposal today, Senator Sasser said that "bilateral negotiations are the key to easing hostilities in Central America, and they are the key to preventing U.S. involvement in a war in Central America."

'A Question of War and Peace'

"The question before the Senate today is a question of war and peace," Senator Sasser said. "Will the Administration commit to peace before it commits to war? In the face of so crucial a question, I believe the American people deserve an enlightened foreign policy that truly gives peace a chance."

"Let's put the Sandinistas to the test," Mr. Sasser concluded. "I urge my colleagues: Vote for a negotiated settlement before we let loose the dogs of war in Central America."

But supporters of the President repeated the Administration argument that if Washington agrees to talk to Managua, the Sandinistas should agree to talk to the contras. Senator Sasser and other Administration critics maintain that the Sandinistas would never agree to talk to the contras and that such a condition would effectively kill all chances of a peaceful settlement.